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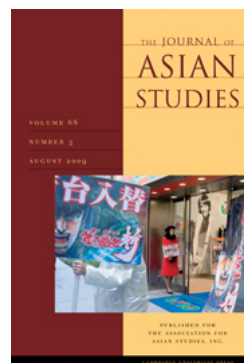
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***The Culture of Secrecy in Japanese Religion.* Edited by Bernhard Scheid and Mark Teeuwen. New York: Routledge, 2006. xvii, 397 pp. \ \$180.00 (cloth).**

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continues to improve its political position, its emphasis on soft power and global engagement will mean that middle-power internationalists will likely regain some of their status in Tokyo, and the normal nation-alists will fall back on the defensive. But regardless of the results of Japan's next elections or the trajectory of the Nikkei, grand strategists on both side of the Pacific will be grappling with the dilemmas and choices laid out in *Securing Japan* for some time to come.

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This is a collection of fifteen essays investigating a wave of secrecy in the transmission of knowledge that swept Japan between the twelfth and sixteenth centuries. This “culture” appeared to develop first in esoteric Buddhism, then spreading to the world of Shinto, the theater, and beyond before naturally deteriorating and then becoming marginalized altogether at the hands of a skeptical and well-informed early modern public. As Mark Teeuwen notes in the introduction, this is still a relatively new field of inquiry, seeking to build upon and move beyond two broad themes in past scholarship: secrecy in religion as a corrupt offshoot of a central mystery in which many religions have some basis (Mircea Eliade, Kees W. Bolle), and secrecy as a necessary element of human social intercourse (Georg Simmel, and more recently Hugh B. Urban and others).

In the present volume, secrecy is tackled primarily in terms of the relationship between content and context (the *what* and *why* of secrecy) and the persistent tension between concealment and partial disclosure. Teeuwen provides us with a road map of sorts at the outset, suggesting that we think about the Japanese case in terms of three broad periods of time, each characterized by a particular “discourse of secrecy” (p. 10). Up to the twelfth century, secrecy primarily involved a “skill in means” (p. 10), with certain Buddhist teachings appropriate only for those who had progressed to a given level in spiritual training; following this, the period up until the seventeenth century witnessed the turning of objects, places, and texts into mandalas that, to those with the necessary esoteric knowledge, contained representations of absolute reality; finally, from the seventeenth century, secrecy was increasingly viewed as “a violation of the public good” (p. 16), perceived to be synonymous with fakery, fraud, and the perversion of religious development among the general public.

This framework, which Teeuwen is careful to stress is intentionally rather general, will likely be of great utility to readers who are interested in the dynamics of secrecy but relatively unfamiliar with medieval Japanese Buddhism. The fourteen main essays are written by scholars in religious studies, language and literature, theology, and history; though many of them offer some useful general thoughts on “secrecy” at the outset, few of the pieces include the sort of general introduction to their highly specialized subject matter that might spare the blushes of the uninitiated.

The essays are organized into three parts: Part I, “Prologue,” offers three essays on secrecy outside Japan; this is followed by eight essays in Part II under the heading “Japan’s Medieval Culture of Secrecy”; finally, Part III comprises three pieces on “The Demise of Secrecy.”

Albert de Jong’s essay in part I offers useful analytical clarifications where secrecy, restrictions, privacy, esotericism, and mysticism are concerned, before discussing the religions of the ancient world. De Jong points out that “secrets and secrecy are annoying for scholars,” because it is difficult to be certain that the available sources give an accurate impression of the content of secret transmissions (pp. 53–54). Methodological considerations such as this might profitably have been given more in-depth treatment in the introduction.

Indian and Chinese Tantric Buddhism around the eighth and ninth centuries are considered in subsequent essays by Ronald M. Davidson and Martin Lehnert, respectively. Textual analysis here uncovers vivid examples of sociopolitical and missionary uses of religious secrecy, most notably through a rhetoric of secrecy that was both built into religious texts and featured in dramatic accounts by religious leaders such as Amoghavajra (a Buddhist monk who wielded great political influence in Tang China) about the circumstances surrounding the transmission of secret teachings. Concealment and disclosure appear not always as a problematic tension for religious leaders, but often as a useful rhetorical tool for enhancing the prestige of both the teaching and the teacher through an insistence on the privileged nature of the knowledge involved and its potency where rulership is concerned.

Part II begins with two pieces on Japanese esoteric Buddhism. Fabio Rambelli’s essay includes an examination of the training of Shingon monks that suggests many aspects of a supposedly “secret” tradition were transmitted in lectures rather than invariably taking the more exclusive form of a one-to-one transmission. Looking at Tendai, Lucia Dolce discusses the “mandalisation”—the turning into a mandala—of the Lotus Sutra as part of an expansion of the esoteric elements of Tendai.

Secrecy as social and cultural as well as symbolic currency, and an unstable one at that, is a theme shared by four of the remaining six essays in Part II. Teeuwen uses the example of the *sokui kanjō* (the imperial enthronement unction) to illustrate the rewards attached to the ownership of a secret. Nobumi Iyanaga, in discussing the thirteenth-century text *Juhō yōjin-shū* and the “golden mean” that esoteric Buddhism had to keep between concealment and disclosure (p. 204), suggests that the proliferation and transmission of secret teachings—including cross-transmission (between different master–

disciple lineages)—was influential in the short term, but oversupply eventually led to an inflationary loss of value. Susan Blakeley-Klein moves the collection away from religion into the intimately related area of Noh theater. She examines the development of a set of secret teachings as one of a number of strategies employed by a troupe leader, Konparu Zenchiku, seeking to enhance the fortunes of his troupe in competing for patronage. Bernhard Scheid examines two distinct modes of secrecy in the transmission of knowledge about the *Nihon shoki* by the Urabe family, whose members had established themselves at court as experts on the text; the first mode involved the arrogation and careful guardianship of knowledge about the *Nihon shoki*, while the second and later mode, influenced by esoteric Buddhism, involved a shift in content toward a suggestion of hidden meanings within the text.

Finally, Bernard Faure and Kadoya Atsushi return the collection to a consideration of content over and above context. Faure looks at the evocative power of concealment in the case of *hibutsu*, (hidden buddhas), and Shōten in particular. Kadoya examines and illustrates a list of “Ten Sacred Treasures” as a means of gaining insight into the nature and workings of the logic underlying medieval Shinto thought, which he characterizes as “synthetic,” in contrast to the “analytic” logic emerging from the early modern period onward (pp. 279–81).

Part III looks at how medieval secrecy lost its authority yet lived on in various guises in the early modern period. William M. Bodiford suggests a multiplicity of factors contributing to the demise of secret transmission of knowledge in Tendai, from a desire to reform both its teachings and its monks to a broad new interest in textual study and the passing of religious teachings increasingly into the public domain. Anne Walthall and Kate Wildman Nakai both point to a shift in the function of secrecy toward the representation of political authority to the public. Walthall looks at how Tokugawa shogunal concealment, through the use of screens and the careful positioning of the shogun and regional leaders or foreign envoys during audiences, served to project a highly nuanced sense of power. Nakai discusses the fresh ways in which esoteric medieval texts were read by nineteenth-century scholars newly concerned with public loyalty.

With its diverse essays, each accompanied by an extensive bibliography of its own, *The Culture of Secrecy in Japanese Religion* provides students and scholars not so much with an integrated study as a rich sample of potential directions for further scholarship. For a topic still in the relatively early stages of development, this is a very welcome approach. It means, however, that considerable investment is required of nonspecialist readers seeking to further the general comparative debate on secrecy to which Teeuwen alludes in the introduction.

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